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Reagan 'supercabinet' to have low profile?

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President-elect Ronald Reagan's "supercabinet" concept is undergoing stresses and strains even before it becomes a reality.

There now is a strong possibility that it will be a de facto "supercabinet," not a formal one.

That is, Mr. Reagan intends to have an elite advisory group within the official Cabinet that will counsel him in making decisions on subjects across the board.

But due to objections he is hearing, the President-elect now may put this plan into action quietly — making it part of his government but playing down its existence so as not to antagonize the other Cabinet members.

The Reagan chief of staff-designate, James Baker, is one of those who is pushing for this quiet approach to the adoption of "supergovernment."

"Otherwise," he says, "you are going to downgrade 11 other Cabinet members — and in so doing you irritate their constituencies within their

departments."

"Also," said Mr. Baker, "you antagonize the committee chairmen in Congress whose activity is related to the Cabinet members who are left out of the supergovernment."

It is understood that it is Reagan's intention to put together a hard-core advisory unit that would consist of Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Treasury Donald T. Regan, Attorney General William French Smith, and, very likely, CIA director William Casey.

Edwin Meese III, who will be a Cabinet-rank counselor to Reagan, is strongly backing the formal "supercabinet" concept. In fact, it seems that all that now needs to be decided is whether the President-elect will emphasize or play down his move to this kind of government — one which copies his approach as governor of California.

"If we decide to do it [publicly announce a supercabinet]," said Baker, "I'll do what I can to see that it works."

Otherwise, Baker pointed out, he had no doubt that the President would set up this kind of government anyway — that is, he would be meeting with only a select few of his Cabinet most of the time.

Baker made it clear that he could live much more comfortably with a supercabinet of this kind — soft-pedaled so as not to embarrass the other members of the Cabinet.

Who will win out in this early Reagan White House inner struggle?

One observer points out that an answer may lie in the offices Baker and Meese are going to occupy. Baker gets Jack Watson's chief-of-staff office, a choice location.

But the "prime property," now occupied by Zbigniew Brzezinski and earlier by Henry A. Kissinger, goes to Meese.

Meese is extremely close to Reagan and has been for years.

But Baker has won Reagan's admiration and respect in recent months during the campaign — and his "say" is being given a lot of weight by the President-elect.

In the supercabinet concept, Meese would play a central role as coordinator, moderator, and, at times, consultant to the President.

Both Baker and Meese are known for being good natured and easy to get along with. Thus, they are working out how the supercabinet will be implemented in an amicable way that will not threaten to erode their exceptionally good relationship.